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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000160

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/21/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: RED-SHIRTS, YELLOW-SHIRTS CONTINUE DIALOGUE AT A SLOWER  
PACE

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 138 (BEGIN DIALOGUE)  
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 132 (DOWNPLAY RECONCILIATION CALL)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

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Summary and Comment  
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[1](#)1. (C) In separate meetings with red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups, leaders told CG they want to move ahead with their fledgling reconciliation efforts, though they are afraid of a backlash from extreme elements on both sides. Nonetheless, they have met repeatedly, established a plan of work, and set goals. Meanwhile, the private sector and academic representatives that initially called for a reduction in violence for the benefit of Chiang Mai's economy are becoming more involved.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Though it is picking up steam, the dialogue process is still fragile, and any number of unfortunate events could derail it. Over the past few days, Rak Chiang Mai 51 (RCM51) - the pro-Thaksin group with the most violent record - has verbally threatened red-shirt leaders participating in the reconciliation process via its radio station. Separately, at a two-day seminar organized in Chiang Mai by United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) leaders from Bangkok attended by approximately 800 red-shirt supporters from the north, the UDD leaders intimated they wanted to provoke a political showdown in Bangkok. Continued threats by RCM51 or street violence between red-shirts and yellow-shirts could bring the process to a screeching halt. We will continue to emphasize the need for political demonstrations to be peaceful, and for change to come about in accordance with the rule of law. End Summary and Comment.

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Consulate Engages Red-Shirts, Yellow-Shirts  
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[1](#)3. (C) As part of Mission Thailand's effort to engage political actors on both sides of the spectrum, CG opened separate meetings with local red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups with an identical message: we recognize that both sides have genuine political differences; political demonstrations are normal in a

democracy, but they must be peaceful and not interfere with the functioning of the government; change must take place peacefully, be constitutional, and be undertaken in accordance with the rule of law. He added that honest and open dialogue are key to a functioning democracy, and expressed the hope that red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups could find political space for that exchange of views.

¶4. (C) Violence serves no one, continued the CG; it only harms Thailand's image and damages the economy. The U.S. will not take sides in Thailand's political debate, he added, but we will speak out when actions taken by either side threaten democracy. CG cited the U.S. response to the 2006 coup, and statements condemning the 2008 seizures of Bangkok's airports and 2009 violence in Pataya as examples.

¶5. (C) Leaders of three red-shirt groups told the CG that sustainable change can come about in Thailand only when the voices of the majority are heard. On average, only 26 million of Thailand's 35 million eligible voters cast ballots, they asserted, with roughly 14 million voting for pro-red-shirt candidates and some eight million for the Democrat Party, with the rest of the vote divided among smaller groups. Although both red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups think they can seize power and run the country, neither side can sustain a grip on power without partners, they argued. Hence, if the red-shirts want to run Thailand, they need to find like-minded groups with which to work. Both red-shirt and yellow-shirt leaders agreed that in order to make tangible progress, both sides need to shed their colors.

¶6. (C) The red-shirt leaders spoke of creating a "mass party" that would not be a Phuea Thai puppet. We do not want our

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members to be political pawns, one exclaimed. Of the 11 MPs that represent Chiang Mai, only one is "acceptable," he added. We need to involve the people directly in politics and promote candidates who represent them in upcoming elections, he said. Another opined that a mass red-shirt party might be able to find common ground and work with the New Politics Party, though their ideologies are very different.

¶7. (C) Both red-shirt and yellow-shirt leaders related that they had met twice as a group to agree on goals. Since our meeting with them, the two sides have met a third time. Though they have not resolved their political differences, both sides appear to be working towards an arrangement that would allow them to peacefully express their views without intimidation by the other.

¶8. (C) Both groups acknowledged they have undertaken this effort mainly to help revive Chiang Mai's economy and prevent a welcoming image for tourists. One yellow-shirt leader expressed the hope that through joint public activities and the peaceful passing of major upcoming festivals such as Loy Krathong, the King's Birthday and Buddhist New Year, both sides could restore international confidence in Chiang Mai's ability to play host to tourists and show off its traditional culture. If all goes well, he opined, we might be able to have a joint declaration renouncing violence by Buddhist New Year (March 2010).

¶9. (SBU) Meanwhile, the private sector and academic figures who issued the initial call for reconciliation between both sides

(Ref B) held a news conference on October 21 reaffirming their support for efforts on both sides to revive Chiang Mai's economy and promote civil society dialogue. [We'll have a read-out of the conference tomorrow and will have something to add to this para]

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Obstacles Remain  
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¶10. (SBU) Despite this progress, several recent events have highlighted the fragility of the dialogue process. Threats against one red-shirt leader by the radical pro-Thaksin RCM51 group prompted him to pull out of a planning meeting the two sides held on October 16. His withdrawal prevented both sides and business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Thai Industries from holding a press conference they had planned for October 19. Meanwhile, in public comments on October 20, the RCM51 leader stated that although he welcomed efforts to revive Chiang Mai's economy and promote tourism, he would not make peace with yellow-shirts or be seen with them in public.

¶11. (SBU) In separate public comments on the same television program, a yellow-shirt representative noted her group's desire to find political space for both sides to express their views peacefully and without fear of intimidation by the other. Both leaders were reserved about the possibility of reconciliation.

¶12. (C) Meanwhile, UDD leaders from Bangkok told an 800-strong crowd at Chiang Mai's sports stadium that they are planning for a major rally in Bangkok in the next few weeks to press for new elections as soon as possible. A local red-shirt leader who attended the sessions confided that he believes the UDD will try to force the governing coalition from power, either by instigating red-yellow violence on the streets of Bangkok, thereby provoking a military response, or by simply forcing the coalition to step down. Our contact told us that if this "showdown" takes place, it could reverse the progress that red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups in Chiang Mai have made in recent weeks. He argued at the stadium for a reconsideration of the UDD's plan, but his calls were ignored, he said.  
ANDERSON